United Nations A/C.3/56/SR.17

General Assembly
Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
2 November 2001

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 17th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 22 October 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Al-Hinai ..... (Oman)

Contents

Agenda item 112: Advancement of women (*continued*)*

Agenda item 113: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (*continued*)*

* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

01-59445 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 112: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/56/3, 38, 174, A/56/222-S/2001/736, A/56/268, 279, 306, 316, 328, 329 and 472)

Agenda item 113: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (*continued*) (A/56/222-S/2001/736, A/56/306, 319 and Add.1)

1. **Mr. Kumar Regmi** (Nepal), after associating himself with the statement by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that, although women were the pivot of the family, the patriarchal societies in which most of them had been raised encouraged their subordination and discrimination against them in most fields. While the developed countries had made great headway towards equality and were being emulated by the developing countries, the situation was still unsatisfactory, especially for many women in rural areas.

2. Not only the international community, but also the national and international media, had an important role to play in ensuring adequate legal provisions for the promotion of women's rights, education, skills training, entrepreneurship activities and employment-generation, and in projecting a more favourable image of women. Equally crucial were the participation of women in politics and decision-making, awareness-raising and measures to eliminate trafficking in women and violence against them.

3. While a great deal had been achieved in regard to the commitments made at the 1995 Beijing Conference and reiterated at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the overall implementation of those commitments left much to be desired, and required concerted efforts. His delegation wholeheartedly supported the efforts of the United Nations system, as described in the report of the Secretary-General (A/56/219 and Add.1), and advocated that the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) should receive the resources and support needed for them to play a more active role in the promotion of women and their rights and in decision-making.

4. Despite many successful initiatives by the Government, the overall status of women in Nepal was still unsatisfactory, as it was in many developing countries, in terms of the gender gap in education, public services and policy-making. The authorities were enacting several laws and revising others to bring them into line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the basic guidelines of the Beijing Platform for Action had been incorporated into the country's development plan. Female-specific programmes in education, health and income-generation had achieved a measure of success. Political parties even allotted quotas for women to enable them to participate at all levels of politics, while all organizations were expected to try to prevent violence against women and ensure protection of their human rights.

5. **Mr. Tekin** (Turkey) said that the age-old legacy of Turkish women's emancipation had been a useful foundation on which to construct its goal of enhancing their rights and status and making gender equality a reality. Gender-equality activities conducted by governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations were coordinated by a special directorate in the Office of the Prime Minister which interacted with academic bodies and non-governmental organizations and had helped shape gender policy.

6. One result of inter-ministerial policy dialogue had been some decentralization whereby focal points established in provincial governors' offices provided services and disseminated information. The media were instrumental in increasing public interest in gender issues, as demonstrated by the many women's studies programmes and government-subsidized research centres in existence at universities throughout the country since the mid-1990s.

7. Given the Government's encouragement for the involvement of civil society in gender-mainstreaming policies, non-governmental organizations were represented on the four committees set up to deal with education, health, employment and law, in the wake of the Beijing Conference, to expedite implementation of its Platform for Action. Turkey had undertaken legal reforms in accordance with international conventions and the demands of women's movements. A party to the Convention since 1985, Turkey had withdrawn its

reservations in 1999 and had signed the Optional Protocol in 2000.

8. He reaffirmed his Government's commitment to pursue full gender equality and to cooperate with the United Nations to that end. In that connection, his country would shortly be hosting an expert meeting on the gender perspective of environmental management and mitigation of natural disasters, organized jointly by the Organization's Division for the Advancement of Women and its International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. The findings would be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its next session. Turkish civil society had much to contribute to the meeting, in view of the terrible earthquakes Turkey had experienced in 1999.

9. **Mr. Bhattacharjee** (India) said that implementation of gender equality posed a major challenge, especially for developing countries. Having long recognized the need for targeted programmes for the advancement of women, India had reserved one third of the seats on elected village councils for women, while numerous social-service institutions and mechanisms targeted women and children, and laws against sexual harassment in the workplace had been enacted. India's initial report, considered by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2000, had attested to the seriousness India accorded to the implementation of the Beijing recommendations and to its own goals for the advancement of women.

10. Commenting on the reports before the Committee, he expressed his delegation's dismay at INSTRAW's precarious situation, and hoped that Member States would not let it founder. His delegation agreed, by and large, with the focus of the report of the Secretary-General on improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/56/268). It considered, however, that the solutions advocated were only partial, having failed to address the macro-factors that caused or aggravated the problems faced by rural women, or the impact that the global dynamics of integration had on them. It was vital that Governments received resources for taking affirmative action to counter those problems.

11. Traditional practices that affected female health called not only for legislative measures, but fundamental social change. Since the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women had shown that poverty contributed to the persistence of such practices, poverty eradication needed to be urgently addressed. His delegation hoped that UNIFEM's new agenda of promoting women's leadership in governance, peace and security would not delay its work on the economic advancement of women, which was still a major challenge for most developing countries.

12. He hoped that the report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action requested in resolution 55/71 would be submitted to the forthcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women and to the next session of the General Assembly, inasmuch as the report before the Committee (A/56/319 and Add.1) simply outlined the activities of the United Nations system in mainstreaming gender into its activities.

13. **Mr. Ounseng Vixay** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

14. Despite some important landmarks and satisfactory results on the women's movement's road to development, equality and world peace, many challenges persisted. Notwithstanding progressive policies for women formulated by some Governments, including his own, women still lived in poor conditions. Those in rural areas, millions of whom still lived below the poverty line, also required basic services, political rights and decision-making power. Genuine sustainable rural development and poverty eradication were the only remedies, especially in developing countries.

15. Recognizing women as an integral part of national development, his Government had formulated policies that involved them as equal partners at all levels, upgrading their skills to improve their employment opportunities.

16. Accordingly, the Lao Women's Union had adopted a five-year plan, accompanied by a four-point strategy, to enable women to play their role in the country's economic, political and social life as productive contributors to, and beneficiaries of, national development.

17. **Ms. Samah** (Algeria) said that the international community had integrated the gender dimension into policies and programmes, campaigned against violence

against women, and raised awareness of the need to respect their fundamental rights. However, it needed to redouble its efforts to further minimize, if not eliminate, the adverse consequences of world events, which made them even more vulnerable. Their burden had increased through HIV/AIDS and other diseases, the globalization of armed conflicts, and the upsurge in the traffic in women. In the light of those evils, her country had signed the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three protocols, and ratification was under consideration. Her delegation urged that the extremely nebulous concept of human security, which occasionally "reared its head" in the Committee's deliberations, should be banished from its ambit.

18. Algeria had fully participated in the Beijing Conference and the twenty-third special session, and reaffirmed its commitment to their objectives. It was engaged in the preparation of numerous programmes and policies on women's participation in all aspects of the country's life, as well as their education and maternal and child health.

19. Her country's authorities devoted a great deal of attention to rural women and girls and provided them with technical advice, material and financial resources and access to bank credit or agricultural loans. World Rural Women's Day, on 15 October, was used to impart information to women in rural areas for establishing their own businesses and gaining some economic independence.

20. In 2001 many Algerian women had been appointed to very senior positions, such as judges, ambassadors and academic deans. Trade unions had organized seminars to apprise women of their rights, determine the role of the law in solving working women's problems, and ensure equality in all areas, including labour legislation.

21. She exhorted the international community to engage in constructive dialogue and closer cooperation to meet the goals set at the twenty-third special session.

22. **Ms. Al Khalifa** (Bahrain) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The advancement of women meant the advancement of society because of the vital role of women as teachers of each successive generation. Women's rights must be preserved and confirmed to bring about gender equality in terms of rights and obligations. During the current year an association of working women had been created. Bahraini women, however, had gone further, seeking to enter the election, to be held in the current month, of the governing board of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

23. Among the advances realized by women in recent years, mention should be made of the role played by women's associations in Bahrain, the first of which had been established as early as the 1950s. The associations had been active in eradicating illiteracy among women who had missed the opportunity for education, organizing evening classes for them with the Ministry of Education.

24. The Prime Minister of Bahrain, when speaking of the importance of Bahrain's acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, had referred to the role and contribution of Bahraini women side by side and on an equal footing with men.

25. No mention of the advancement of women was complete, she said, without reference to the dire effects of Israeli occupation on Palestinian women, who lived under the stranglehold of an economic blockade and were subjected to beating and killing even in front of international television cameras. It was difficult to imagine how women could achieve any development under such harsh conditions. Her delegation hoped that humanitarian organizations for women and the international community would take a greater interest in their intolerable situation.

26. **Mrs. Thandar** (Myanmar) associated herself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. She recalled that a favourite theme at the Beijing Conference had been "Think globally, act locally", which was equally relevant in 2001, as attested to in Myanmar's initial report, submitted to CEDAW in 2000.

27. In her country, women and men enjoyed equal rights, and boys were not favoured over girls, since there was no dowry system and no family names to be perpetuated. Women of Myanmar had long enjoyed the right to inherit and the right to half of all assets in the event of divorce.

28. A number of women-oriented non-governmental organizations had been formed in the country and a

national plan of action formulated to promote the advancement of women, especially those living in remote border areas. The Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association worked closely with other non-governmental organizations and with the United Nations system and conducted vocational training programmes, operated a credit scheme for women starting their own business, and ran many day-care centres and maternity homes.

29. A national task force had been formed to combat trafficking in women and children, and women under 25 were forbidden to cross borders unaccompanied by parents or guardians. She called on the international community to support her country in its endeavours to improve the lot of its women with the limited resources at its disposal.

30. **Ms. Romulus** (Haiti) said that, although women made a significant contribution to income-generating activities, there had been few changes in the division of domestic responsibilities. The difficulties women encountered when seeking or retaining employment often forced them to abandon their careers and return to their domestic tasks, although experience had shown that the participation of women in all spheres of working life was a guarantee of sustainable growth, social balance and a peaceful future.

31. Haitian women were very involved in production, particularly in the informal sector, and in agriculture, considered indispensable for Haiti's development. They made an important contribution to national savings, but had limited access to education, health care and leisure.

32. Certain deep-rooted social and cultural values, which it was difficult to combat, also stood in the way of achieving gender equality. The creation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs at the beginning of the 1990s had been a first step towards improving the State's response to the problems faced by women; however, the Civil Code needed to be revised to take into account the needs and values of women, particularly rural women.

33. In theory, the full participation of women in Haitian society had been recognized long before the Beijing Conference. However, since then, in accordance with the Convention, the Ministry of Women's Affairs had identified discriminatory articles in domestic legislation and had also taken measures to improve the treatment of women by law enforcement agencies.

34. In the economic sector, priority had been given to improving the socio-economic conditions of women in order to increase national productivity. With the assistance of the international community, micro-credits had been established, which should help to integrate women more fully into society.

35. In the field of education, the figures showed evident advances in school attendance by girls. Recent regional meetings had urged all Governments to integrate women into the ranks of decision makers, and the 1999 electoral law of Haiti had included quotas for women.

36. Gender equality was not an end in itself. It should be combined with an affirmation of the specific qualities of women. There was no place for the aggressiveness with which certain organizations advocated gender equality, because ensuring that women had the same rights as men did not equate masculinizing them.

37. **Ms. Šimonović** (Croatia) said that Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) recognized the need to integrate women more effectively into the international peace process worldwide; women should therefore also be fully integrated into the international fight against terrorism.

38. Gender equality had been accepted as a fundamental value and goal of the twenty-first century. It would require some time to attain it and her delegation turned to the United Nations for leadership in pursuing the goals established since the Beijing Conference. The outcome document of the International Conference on Human Rights and Democratization, held in Dubrovnik earlier in October 2001, identified United Nations human rights priorities and the importance of applying a gender perspective in all spheres.

39. Croatia was a party to the Convention and had ratified the Optional Protocol. It had also amended its Constitution to explicitly include gender equality as one of the highest constitutional values. In collaboration with the governmental and non-governmental sectors, the Commission for Gender Equality had prepared a new national policy for the promotion of equality for the period 2001-2005, based on the resolutions of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

40. After the parliamentary elections of January 2000, the proportion of women in Parliament had quadrupled, to nearly 25 per cent. A new parliamentary committee for gender equality had been established in January 2001. Women now comprised the majority of employees in executive bodies, the judiciary and local self-government bodies, although there were still insufficient women occupying senior political positions. Women represented nearly half of the workforce, but a little over half in the informal sector. Consequently, the economic empowerment of women was one of the most important challenges facing the country.

41. Civil society played a very important role in Croatia, particularly non-governmental organizations that worked in the area of women's rights and in raising awareness on different forms of discrimination against women. The Government supported their efforts by financing some projects.

42. **Mr. Mun** Jong Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that all countries should pursue policies to protect the rights and interests of women and encourage women to participate fully in social, economic and political life. Women should be encouraged to participate in international forums, including the United Nations, so as to contribute to peace and development.

43. Discrimination and violence against women could not be justified in any circumstances. The root cause of violence against women today lay in the impunity of past crimes against women, and his delegation again pointed out that Japan had still failed to acknowledge its past crimes against humanity. During its colonial rule of Korea, Japan had forced over 200,000 Korean women to act as "comfort women" for the Japanese Army. After that had been denounced before international forums, including the United Nations, Japan had merely responded by establishing the "Asian Women's Fund" in order to appease the international community, although a sincere apology and full compensation for the victims had been demanded. The issue had now been eliminated from the country's official history. Japan had also refused entry to his country's delegation invited to take part in meetings on the "comfort women" issue organized by the non-governmental sector. Japan was strongly urged to accept its full responsibility for its past crimes by making a formal apology and providing compensation to the victims.

44. Lastly, he noted that the feminization of poverty increased the potential for women to become the victims of exploitation, trafficking and prostitution. Action should be taken to eradicate poverty and provide the material conditions to ensure the advancement of women with full enjoyment of their rights.

45. **Ms. Cain Marcus** (United States of America) said that culture could not be used to justify the denial of a woman's human rights. Among the most egregious violations were the atrocities committed by the Taliban against women in Afghanistan. Women who violated the Taliban decrees were beaten, imprisoned or even killed. A society that denied them education, health care, freedom of movement and employment would also deny others their human rights. Over recent years, there had been a growing worldwide awareness that women were so integral to a society's well-being that Governments and institutions could not thrive if they ignored women's rights or excluded them from political and economic participation.

46. It was estimated that more than 700,000 persons, particularly women and children, were trafficked each year. That was a modern form of slavery, yet only recently had Governments begun to address the problem systematically. Strong individual and collective action was needed to address all aspects of trafficking, and her Government was now implementing a new law to that effect. It had signed the two protocols on trafficking in persons, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It had also ratified ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour, and welcomed new partnerships in combating trafficking.

47. In January 2000, the Security Council had recognized that the HIV/AIDS pandemic — to which women and girls were especially vulnerable — was a major threat to development and security, while the Commission on the Status of Women had emphasized that the full enjoyment by women and girls of all human rights was of crucial importance in preventing the further spread of the disease. The United States was currently the world's largest bilateral donor of HIV/AIDS-related assistance; it had just announced a founding donation of $200 million to the global fund for the fight against HIV/AIDS and was proud to be participating in the international working group that was establishing the parameters of the fund.

48. Her delegation welcomed the Economic and Social Council's recent declaration, which recognized that the full participation of women in political, economic and social life was crucial to sustainable development. Women had an important leadership role to play in preventing conflict, encouraging reconciliation and helping rebuild conflict-ridden societies. They were an under-utilized force for peace and their presence in peace-building efforts should be actively promoted.

49. **Mr. Andrabi** (Pakistan) said that his delegation fully associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. While 2000 had been of considerable significance for the advancement of women, efforts should continue, because, although globalization had ushered in unprecedented opportunities, it had adversely affected the least fortunate, and made women more vulnerable to exploitation. In that respect, poverty eradication was an essential step towards a world free of exploitation.

50. Pakistan remained committed to the ideals of gender equality and the empowerment of women embodied in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as demonstrated by the establishment of the National Commission on the Status of Women in July 2000, pursuant to its national plan of action. The Commission had constituted committees on education, health, the judicial system and violence against women, which would submit recommendations for action.

51. The Government was endeavouring to achieve gender equality in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action and the resolutions of the twenty-third special session. The national plan of action for women addressed 12 critical areas and its implementation was currently being assessed. Since the Beijing Conference, Pakistan had made significant progress in various areas, including prison conditions, provision of credit and local government, where one third of seats were reserved for women.

52. At the regional level, Pakistan had taken part in the meeting of the regional steering committee for the advancement of women held in Kuala Lumpur in September 2000. One of its recommendations was to promote opportunities for dialogue between rural women from the different countries of the region.

53. **Ms. Mahouve Same** (Cameroon) said that solutions to global problems — whether of a social, political, economic or environmental nature — must take full account of women's needs. The world's women continued to face violence, discrimination and injustice on a daily basis. The impact on their physical and mental well-being restricted their choices in society still further, preventing their full and equal participation. Although progress had been made at a normative level, including revision of discriminatory law, practice lagged far behind. Women's economic capacities were limited, as was their ability to provide for their families and to care for their children.

54. Although recent decades had seen an increase in women's participation in decision-making at all levels, most major decisions affecting the future of the planet were taken by men. Women's economic and other rights continued to be trampled — a factor which exacerbated the feminization of poverty, particularly in developing countries.

55. Convinced that equity and people-centred development were crucial to national prosperity, her delegation welcomed the fact that important concerns previously relegated to the domain of "women's issues" were now centre-stage in the development debate. It was globally recognized now that development was unachievable without an improvement in the status of women.

56. In the context of national efforts for the advancement of women, her delegation was particularly appreciative of the support provided by the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Despite economic difficulties, her Government had succeeded in creating a favourable environment for the promotion of women's rights, as evidenced by revision of family law, slightly increased schooling of girls, improved school textbooks, greater access to reproductive health and family-planning services and enhanced involvement of women in politics. (Women currently occupied nearly one quarter of senior Party posts and 10 per cent of posts in Parliament.)

57. Rural women — who produced 90 per cent of the country's foodstuffs — received special treatment under national development policy, which included measures for agricultural productivity, crop storage, water provision and training for agricultural workers. Relaxation of the law of association had paved the way

for the formation of several rural women's associations.

58. The Government was currently implementing a five-year national women and development plan, designed to improve the living conditions and legal status of women, enhance female human resources in all sectors of development, promote the participation of women in decision-making, protect the girl child, combat violence against women and improve women's nutrition.

59. **Ms. Cedoño Reyes** (Venezuela) said that democracy should be founded on the right to equality, and that each country should create conditions guaranteeing equality between men and women in the exercise of power. In the 1999 Constitution of Venezuela gender equality had been included among the principles on which the rights and duties of citizens were based. In Venezuela, the National Plan for Women 1998-2003 had been drawn up in accordance with and with the commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action. The National Women's Institute, as the mechanism for the advancement of women, was promoting the gender perspective through initiatives in micro-credit, job creation and vocational training for women.

60. The impact of HIV/AIDS had been disproportionately severe on women; it was therefore essential to incorporate a gender perspective in programmes to control the disease by empowering women to make decisions regarding their own sexuality and reproductive health. Her delegation had been pleased to note that the outcome of the twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly had taken into account the gender-related realities of the pandemic and had taken a proactive approach. The National Women's Institute was also working to increase women's representation in politics and government, and had begun to make some progress in that area. Rural women had been at an even greater disadvantage since the economic crises of the 1980s, and the Institute had responded by naming a commissioner for rural women's rights and had allocated 30 per cent of its micro-credit funds to them.

61. The Government had implemented a series of policies and laws to combat violence against women and, together with the National Women's Institute, had drawn up a national plan of action to prevent and punish family violence. Awareness had been raised and recognition gained that family violence was a complex public health problem which should be addressed both by the State and by civil society.

62. Venezuela, which had been a party to the Convention since 1982, had signed the Optional Protocol in 2000 and was in the process of ratifying it, thereby demonstrating its unwavering commitment to the advancement of women at all levels.

63. **Ms. Uluiviti** (Fiji) said that "gender equalization" necessitated far-reaching structural and attitudinal shifts. The new Government in Fiji had reconstituted the Ministry for Women's Affairs alongside the Ministries of Social Welfare and of Poverty Alleviation to reflect the direct correlation between poverty and gender inequality. (Previously, the Ministry had been joined with the Ministry of Culture and Social Welfare.) Gender mainstreaming was being introduced in all policy sectors in furtherance of the Beijing goals.

64. Working women in Fiji were largely concentrated in low-skilled, gender-stereotyped occupations. The country thus had yet to reflect the positive trends highlighted in the Secretary-General's report. Women workers were still often exposed to unhealthy or hostile working conditions, which affected productivity. With half the country's human resources thus underutilized, Fiji continued to forego the benefits of an equitable labour market. The new phenomenon of women migrant workers had further highlighted vulnerabilities in the system: as a receiving country, Fiji had been ill-prepared to meet their specific needs. It had also proved difficult to compile relevant data on such women because of their reluctance to divulge personal information; assistance being provided by UNIFEM in that regard was thus particularly welcome.

65. Current labour reforms in Fiji were geared towards improving working conditions and achieving equal opportunities for women and men. The Government was also exploring ways of encouraging women to enter traditionally male professions. Thanks, in part, to new government machinery for promoting gender equality, some progress had been achieved. However, marginalization and victimization persisted owing to entrenched structural and attitudinal barriers.

66. Fiji women had also been greatly affected by the recent political crisis in the country, and had borne the brunt of the redundancies in unskilled, non-unionized sectors. Fiji women had, however, been instrumental in maintaining peaceful vigils and conducting non-violent

and conciliatory initiatives. In that connection, her delegation welcomed the recommendations contained in the Brahimi report (A/55/305-S/2000/809) and looked forward to their implementation.

67. Her delegation supported the extra meetings proposed for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), but would be keen to see it address its organization of work at pre-sessional meetings. The Commission on the Status of Women should also review its working methods; however, its efforts to integrate the objectives of all the major world conferences into its multi-year work programme were most welcome.

68. Her delegation welcomed gender mainstreaming throughout the United Nations, but regretted the recent decrease in the number of female staff appointed in the Secretariat. It was to be hoped that more women would be recruited for senior and professional posts in the near future.

69. Her delegation was also concerned at the precarious situation of INSTRAW which catered for the needs of developing countries.

70. **Mrs. Tobing-Klein** (Suriname) said that the international community must forge real partnerships to achieve decent life chances and the realization of human rights for all, including the right to development. Some 70 per cent of Suriname's population continued to live below the poverty line. Thanks to international and bilateral aid, the country had, however, made great strides on gender equality, with some women now occupying senior government posts. A National Centre for Gender Policy had been created to coordinate the activities of women's organizations in such fields as health, education, employment and housing.

71. Her country could now boast a gender-mainstreaming training programme for civil servants, developed in collaboration with UNIFEM; a nationwide network to combat violence against women, which also provided shelters; and regional workshops on women in leadership, education and the media.

72. Older women were particularly vulnerable to poverty and deserved special attention, especially in developing countries. In order to ensure that such women were not subjected to discrimination, her Government was currently executing a budget analysis (with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)). A computer training centre had also been established to benefit older women.

73. **Ms. Jarbussynova** (Kazakhstan) said that her Government had always accorded special attention to the advancement of women. Mechanisms were being developed to increase women's integration into social and political life over the long term, and to enhance their participation in decision-making. The National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs had approved a national plan of action elaborated with the assistance of non-governmental organizations.

74. Female health was a matter of serious concern, with women registering very low on the national health index. Two thirds of them were anaemic. The incidence of breast cancer — attributed to the Semipalatinsk nuclear tests and Aral Sea ecological catastrophe — was on the increase. Regrettably, the Government was hampered in its efforts to improve the health situation by difficulties associated with transition to a market economy. It thus welcomed United Nations assistance and looked forward to a broadening of cooperation.

75. Her delegation fully supported the efforts of the United Nations system to improve the status of the world's women. In particular, it wished to stress the important promotion of gender mainstreaming by the Economic and Social Council and the role of UNIFEM.

76. In the light of action currently being carried out in Afghanistan by the global coalition against terrorism, it was particularly vital that the international community should pay attention to the situation in that long-suffering country, where women's rights were constantly violated. The United Nations should elaborate a comprehensive programme to protect such women and their children and to assist them in establishing a new, worthy life in the context of national reconstruction.

77. **Ms. Al Haj Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. She reaffirmed her country's commitment to the conventions and other instruments on the advancement of women, especially the Beijing Platform for Action and the resolutions of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, which promoted women's issues and gender equality in government policy, public opinion, the media and academic institutions. The national strategy for Syrian women to the year 2005 was being

implemented within the framework of the national economic and social development plans.

78. The advancement of women ranked high in her country. The Constitution emphasized the principle of equal rights and obligations and equal opportunities for men and women in all areas of life, even according women certain additional rights. National programmes and plans were founded on those principles. The achievements realized thus far in women's participation in social, economic and political life in the Syrian Arab Republic were obvious. Women participated effectively in Parliament and government. Under the country's labour legislation, women had equal opportunities with men, receiving the same pay as men for the same work. Health-care services for women had improved greatly throughout the country, in both rural and urban areas. Education was free for all, and female illiteracy had decreased. There were also numerous laws severely punishing any crime or practice affecting women's rights or health.

79. Her country had hoped that the international community would take action to implement all aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session resolutely and without double standards. Women's rights must be realized for all women, not just for some. Any talk of equality, freedom and empowerment of women and affirmation of their rights was utopian and ignored international humanitarian law and human rights unless the question of the status of women under foreign occupation was taken up by all. Foreign occupation that violated fundamental rights ran counter to all international covenants and legislation and the relevant Security Council resolutions, which recognized unequivocally the fundamental rights of every human being, whether man, woman or child.

80. Under the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and Palestinian and Lebanese territory, Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese Arab women remained deprived of all those rights. They lacked health care, protection, education, work and other human rights owing to the ugliest kind of discrimination, based fundamentally on the occupation of the land and the application of a policy of repression, colonization and economic blockade by the Israeli occupation forces. Women's organizations in the Syrian Arab Republic, in cooperation with the relevant international organizations and human rights networks, were monitoring the situation of Syrian women in the occupied Syrian Golan to ensure the full exercise of their rights, involving in particular the end of the occupation and the achievement of peace. Inasmuch as those two requirements had not yet been met, any talk of the need for advancement and empowerment of women was far-fetched.

81. **Mr. Shihab** (Maldives) said that the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was encouraging, but that the challenges remaining did not allow for complacency. His Government, in collaboration with civil society, was making efforts to change deep-seated attitudes and practices that perpetuated gender inequality. Constitutional and legislative measures guaranteeing women's rights had been strengthened, and structures were being put into place for the establishment of a gender-management system, in line with the Commonwealth approach to gender mainstreaming.

82. In order to ensure women's access to resources, micro-financing programmes exclusively for women had been launched. Women were being encouraged to enter non-traditional fields, while men were being encouraged to take greater responsibility in family life. The Government had paid particular attention to women's political awareness and legal literacy, and had succeeded in increasing the percentage of women in Parliament from 6 per cent to 10 per cent in the current term.

83. Maldives was making headway in improving the status of women, although the pace had been slower than desired. As a small island developing State, its capacity was restricted by financial and human limitations. He therefore called on the United Nations system and the donor community to support such countries in the pursuit of their goal of integrating women into the mainstream of society.

84. **Ms. Kusorgbor** (Ghana) said that, in Ghana, women's dominance in primary sectors of the economy had been recognized. Gender concerns had therefore been gradually but systematically mainstreamed into national policies and programmes. As a firm commitment to the cause of women and children, the Government had elevated the national machinery on women to a full-fledged Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs headed by a Cabinet minister. Further, aware of the role of formal education in the empowerment of women, it had appointed a minister with responsibility for primary and secondary

education as well as the education of the girl child, specifically to facilitate equal access to basic education for boys and girls and to promote the retention of girls in school.

85. The challenges posed by poverty were deep, and impeded national efforts to achieve the objectives outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. The debilitating effects of poverty weakened women's resolve particularly in the exercise of their rights and independence. To address the root causes of those problems, the Government was reviewing policies on micro-financing for investment and other economic empowerment initiatives. The new Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs had begun efforts to address the needs of rural women in the long term, and in the short term was offering opportunities for non-formal education and vocational training.

86. Her delegation welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and armed conflict. Women and children were the primary victims of wars and civil unrest, and their participation in the solution was critical. It looked forward to the high-level "brainstorming" session to be held in December to elaborate a strategy for implementation of the resolution.

87. Although the challenges of globalization and HIV/AIDS had undermined efforts to give women the status they rightfully deserved, the international community must remain engaged and determined to improve their lot.

88. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), summarizing the debate, said that the many speakers had shared important information on "building blocks" for the advancement of women at the national level and had strongly endorsed the priorities set by the Commission on the Status of Women. Among those priorities, they had highlighted poverty reduction and globalization, debt, official development assistance and structural adjustment from a gender perspective. Violence against women and women in conflict situations was another subject of great interest. The plight of Afghan women had been mentioned frequently, and there was consensus that they must be integrated at an early stage into any peace process. In connection with the problems of trafficking in women, adoption of the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its relevant protocols was viewed as esssential.

89. Among the positive aspects of globalization, efforts to reduce the digital gender gap had been mentioned. Widespread support had been expressed for women's human rights and the work of CEDAW and the Optional Protocol to the Convention. Broad support had also been expressed for an additional session of the Committee to help in clearing its reporting backlog.

90. Progress had been noted in incorporating a gender perspective in the economic sector, reconstruction efforts, micro-credit programmes and the development of indicators. The staff of the Division for the Advancement of Women had heard the imperative to integrate a gender perspective into all future global conferences, such as the forthcoming Second World Assembly on Ageing. The concerns regarding the future of INSTRAW and the need to achieve gender balance in the Secretariat had also been registered. She appreciated the support expressed for the efforts of the Division, while acknowledging that much remained to be done to achieve its goals.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.